

Message Text

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R 251000Z MAY 76

FM AMEMBASSY VALLETTA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6820

INFO AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY ROME

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 VALLETTA 0644

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, MT, LY

SUBJECT: QADHAFI VISIT TO MALTA

REF: VALLETTA 0629, 0636, 0637, 0639; 74 VALLETTA 1910,
1924

1. BEGIN SUMMARY: COLONEL QADHAFI MADE AN OFFICIAL VISIT TO MALTA MAY 21-23, HIS SECOND IN THE LAST YEAR AND A HALF. AS DURING THE PREVIOUS ONE (IN DECEMBER 194), PRIME MINISTER MINTOFF AND THE LABOR PARTY MADE EVERY EFFORT TO UTILIZE QADHAFI'S VISIT FOR MAXIMUM DOMESTIC POLITICAL ADVANTAGE. THE VARIOUS CEREMONIES, MEETINGS AND SPEECHES CONNECTED WITH QADHAFI'S PRESENCE WERE GIVEN EXTENSIVE COVERAGE IN THE PRESS AND ON TELEVISION. HOWEVER, DESPITE MINTOFF'S VIGOROUS EFFORTS, THERE WERE A FEW DISCORDANT NOTES. END SUMMARY

2. OVERALL, QADHAFI'S SECON OFFICIAL VISIT DID NOT APPEAR TO MAKE AS MUCH OF AN IMPACT ON THE GENERAL MALTESE PUBLIC (AS DISTINGUISHED FROM MINTOFF'S VOCAL LABOR PARTY SUPPORTERS) AS HIS FORST ONE. THIS DOUBTLESS WAS PARTIALLY DUE TO THE FACT THAT THE ARRIVED LATE ON
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FRIDAY AFTERNOON AND LEFT EARLY SUNDAY EVENING, WHEN MOST

MALTESE ARE BUSY WITH THEIR WEEKEND FAMILY AFFAIRS. IN ADDITION, THERE WAS A CERTAIN DEGREE OF "WE'VE SEEN AND HEARD IT ALL BEFORE" ATTACHED TO THIS VISIT. AND, FINALLY, THERE WAS SUCH AN OBVIOUS EFFORT BY MINTOFF TO MAKE QADHAFI'S VISIT A TRIUMPHAL ENDORSEMENT OF HIS GOVERNMENT AND THE MALTESE LABOR PARTY, THAT MANY MALTESE WERE JUST TURNED OFF. THE WHOLE AFFAIR WAS OBVIOUSLY MORE OF AN ELECTIONEERING GAMBIT BY THE LABOR PARTY THAN ANYTHING ELSE.

3. QADHAFI RECEIVED FULL MILITARY HONORS AT THE AIRPORT UPON ARRIVAL (HE WAS THREE HOURS LATE, WHICH LED TO A CERTAIN AMOUNT OF GROUNDING AMONG THE DUTIFULLY-ASSEMBLED DIGNITARIES), AND HE WAS OFFICIALLY WELCOMED BY PRESIDENT SIR ANTHONY MAMO AND MOST OF THE LABOR MINISTERS. MINTOFF TURNED UP HIMSELF JUST AT THE LAST MINUTE, IN TIME TO MEET BRIEFLY WITH QADHAFI IN THE PRIVACY OF THE VIP LOUNGE. THE PREARRANGED "CROWD" WAS NOT AS VOCAL OR ENERGETIC AS THE ONE WHICH GREETED QADHAFI IN 1974.

4. ON FRIDAY EVENING, QADHAFI MET WITH A GROUP OF "STUDENTS" AT MALTA'S COLLEGE OF ARTS, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY (MCAST) AND VISITED THE LIBYAN CULTURAL CENTER IN VALLETTA. ON SATURDAY MORNING HE HAD A FORMAL MEETING WITH MINTOFF AT THE AUBERGE DE CASTILLE (AT WHICH MINTOFF'S ENTIRE CABINET WAS PRESENT), FOLLOWING WHICH HE WAS AWARDED THE INSIGNIA OF MALTA'S SOCIETY OF HONOR AT AN OFFICIAL CEREMONY AT THE PRESIDENT'S PALACE. PRESIDENT MAMO LATER GAVE A LUNCHEON FOR QADHAFI AND THE LIBYAN DELEGATION AT SAN ANTO.

5. ON SATURDAY AFTERNOON, QADHAFI MET THE "MALTESE AND FOREIGN PRESS" AT A CAREFULLY STAGED PRESS CONFERENCE, WHICH WAS TELEVISED LATER ON SATURDAY EVENING. THAT SAME NIGHT, QADHAFI "MET WITH THE MALTESE PEOPLE" AT A HUGE LABOR PARTY RALLY HELD IN COSPICUA, WHICH IS MINTOFF'S HOME ELECTORAL DISTRICT.

6. ON SUNDAY MORNING QADHAFI MET WITH MINTOFF AGAIN AT THE PRIME MINISTER'S PRIVATE RESIDENCE IN DELIMARA, WHERE

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HE ALSO HAD LUNCH. IN THE LATER AFTERNOON, HE ADDRESSED A MEETING OF "WORKERS" AT ANOTHER LABOR PARTY GATHERING AT THE FREEDOM PRESS BUILDING. FOLLOWING THIS, QADHAFI AND THE LIBYAN DELEGATION RETURNED TO TRIPOLI ON SUNDAY EVENING, EVEN THOUGH THE OFFICIAL GOM PROGRAM HAD STATED THAT HIS VISIT SHOULD HAVE LASTED UNTIL NOON ON MONDAY, MAY 24. NO EXPLANATION HAS BEEN GIVEN FOR QADHAFI'S EARLY DEPARTURE. HE WAS SEEN OFF AT THE AIRPORT BY

PRESIDENT MAMO, AND ONCE AGAIN ACCORDED FULL MILITARY HONORS ON DEPARTURE.

7. DURING HIS VARIOUS PUBLIC APPEARANCES, QADHAFI EMPHASIZED OVER AND OVER CERTAIN BASIC THEMES, WHICH HE SAW AS IMPORTANT TO LIBYAN/MALTESE RELATIONS. THESE INCLUDED THE FOLLOWING:

(A) THE MALTESE PEOPLE ARE NOT EUROPEAN IN ORIGIN BUT, LIKE THE LIBYANS, ARE OF A "SEMITIC" BACKBROUND. THEREFORE, THE TWO COUNTRIES SHOULD WORK TOGETHER IN "FRATERNAL BROTHERHOOD".

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(B) BOTH MALTA AND LIBYA HAVE THROWN OFF THE YOKE OF THE "EUROPEAN COLONIALISTS" WHO FOR CENTURIES HAD EXPLOITED THEM.

(C) LIBYA HAD "ASSISTED" MALTA DURING THE MALTESE STRUGGLE WITH THE UK OVER THE BRITISH MILITARY BASES IN 1971-72, AND WOULD DO SO AGAIN SHOULD THE NEED ARISE.

(D) MALTA DOES NOT NEED, AND SHOULD NOT HAVE, "FOREIGN MILITARY BASES" ON ITS SOIL. LIBYA WILL HELP MALTA GAIN

"ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE" SO THAT SUCH BASES ARE NOT NECESSARY TO SUPPORT THE MALTESE ECONOMY.

(E) LIBYA, LIKE MALTA, IS IN FAVOR OF A "NEUTRAL" MEDITERRANEAN FREE OF THE "SUPER POWERS". IN THIS CONTEXT, LIBYA WOULD BE "AGAINST" A MALTESE ALLIANCE WITH NATO AFTER 1979. SHOULD A FUTURE MALTESE GOVERNMENT SEEK SUCH AN ALLIANCE, LIBYA WOULD BE "ANABLE TO HELP MALTA ANY LONGER", AND THIS WOULD BE "DANGEROUS AND "DETRIMENTAL TO THE MALTESE PEOPLE."

(F) ITALY WAS A "SEMI-COLONY" BECAUSE OF US BASES ON ITS SOIL, AND LIBYA WAS PREPARED TO HELP ANY PARTY OR
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GROUP PREPARED TO REMOVE SUCH FOREIGN BASES FROM ITALY.

(G) LIBYA IS A FRIEND OF ALL THE MALTESE, INCLUDING THE NATIONALISTS AS WELL AS THE LABORITES. WHATEVER ASSISTANCE LIBYA GIVES MALTA IS NOT DIRECTED TOWARDS A "SINGLE PARTY OR SIMILAR ORGANIZATION".

(H) "WE SHALL MEET AGAIN WHEN MALTA IS FREE FROM FOREIGN BASES."

8. IN CONNECTION WITH POINT (G) ABOVE, QADHAFI RECEIVED A DELEGATION OF THE OPPOSITION NATIONALIST PARTY AT VERDALA CASTLE (WHERE QADHAFI RESIDED WHILE IN MALTA) DURING HIS VISIT, TO THE EXTREME ANNOYANCE OF THE PRO-MINOTFF PRESS. THE NATIONALIST DELEGATION CONSISTED OF VINCENT TABONE, EDDIE FENECH ADAMI, AND MARIO FEDICE, ALL MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT. THE MEETING WAS DESCRIBED AS "ONG AND CORDIAL" BY NATIONALIST SPOKESMEN, AND QADHAFI REPORTEDLY TOLD THEM WHAT HE ALSO SAID PUBLICLY, THAT HE WAS IN MALTA AS A "FRIEND OF ALL THE MALTESE". THE LABORITES WERE OBVIOUSLY MIFFED AT THE NATIONALISTS' HORNING IN, AND EVEN MORE PUT OUT AT QADHAFI'S REPORTED RESPONSE.

9. COMMENT: ON BALANCE, THIS WAS ANOTHER POSITIVE EVENT IN MINTOFF'S RE-ELCTION CAMPAIGN. QADHAFI COMPORTED HIMSELF IN PUBLIC IN A VERY SELF-CONFIDENT MANNER. SMILING AND CAREFUL, HE GENERALLY FOLLOWED MINTOFF'S STAGE DIRECTIONS, BUT IN THE FINAL ANALYSIS SAID WHAT HE THOUGHT. HE LASHED OUT REPEATEDLY AT THE BRITISH BASES IN MALTA, AND MADE IT QUITE CLEAR THAT HE WOULD OPPOSE ANY EXTENSION OF THE MALTESE-NATO MILITARY ARRANGEMENT. ON THE OTHER HAND, HIS FAILURE TO "ENDORSE" MINTOFF VIS-A-VIS THE NATIONALIST OPPOSITION CAME AS SOMETHING OF A SHOCK TO THE LABORITES. AT ONE POINT,

IN RESPONSE TO A QUESTION AS TO HOW THE MALTESE SHOULD VOTE IN THEIR FORTHCOMING ELECTION, QADHAFI SMILED AND SAID THIS WAS "A PERSONAL AND INTERNAL MATTE AND I WILL NOT COMMENT". HE DID ADD THAT MINTOFF WAS "A TRUE FRIEND OF OURS", BUT THAT WAS AS FAR AS HE WOULD GO. QADHAFI'S STRONG ENDORESEMENT OF MINTOFF'S "BROTHERHOOD" CONFIDENTIAL

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THEME HAD PERHAPS AS MUCH OF A NEGATIVE IMPACT AS A POSITIVE ONE. A LARGE MAJORITY OF MALTESE, WHETHER THEY ARE LABORITES OR NATIONALISTS, DO NOT LIKE TO BE TOLD THAT THEY ARE OF "ORIENTAL" ORIGIN AND SPEAK AN "ARABIC" LANGUAGE, AS QADHAIF REPEATEDLY SAID. HOW ALL OF THIS WILL AFFECT THE UNDECIDED MALTESE VOTER CAME ELECTION DAY IS QUESTIONABLE. IN ANY EVENT, QADHAFI HAS COME AND GONE. HE HAS HAD HIS SAY ABOUT MALTA'S FUTURE, NOW IT WILL BE UP TO THE MALTESE TO CHOOSE WHETHER THEIR FUTURE BEST LIES WITH THE TYPE OF "NEUTRALITY" ADVOCATED BY QADHAFI, OR ALTERNATIVELY WITH THE MAINTENANCE OF MALTA'S HOSTORIC WESTERN TIES. IN ANY EVENT, MANY MALTESE ARE VERY UNCOMFORTABLE WITH THE PROSPECT OF A STRONG LIBYAN INFLUENCE IN THEIR AFFIARS, AND THIS IS CERTAIN TO BE A MAJOR ISSUE IN THE FORTHCOMING MALTESE ELECTIONS. WIGGINS

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